

THE STUDY OF MAN

WHAT THE NAZI AUTOPSIES SHOW

The Totalitarian Myth and the Nihilist Reality

IRVING KRISTOL

BEFORE the war, discussion of the "nature of Nazism" threw up many intensely held and sharply conflicting viewpoints: Nazism was a disguised dictatorship of finance capitalism, it was a revolt of declassed intellectuals, it was a cover for a revived German militarism, it was a new kind of non-capitalist non-socialist social order, and so on. The debate was carried on with great acuity and on a very high level of subtlety. It must come as an unpleasant shock, therefore, to hear the distinguished British historian, H. R. Trevor-Roper, say in an aside that Rauschning's *Revolution of Nihilism*—that vulgar and sensational book authored by an ex-Nazi—has turned out to have been, on the whole, a reliable portrait of Nazism.

The Nazis, as they are revealed in postwar autopsies, had no economic, social, or political

THE experience of Nazism did not end on May 8, 1945; it has remained with us, both as burning memory and an appalling possibility. If its brutality and callousness are not without parallel in history, we had led ourselves to believe that mankind had "progressed" far enough to make such horror impossible in our more "enlightened" day. Many books and briefer studies have addressed themselves to the questions, "How could it have happened?" "What potencies of ideology, program, or leadership won Nazism its tremendous victories?" IRVING KRISTOL here scrutinizes some of the historical material made available since the end of the war—plus a number of psychological, sociological, and political analyses—in an attempt to find out "how?" and "why?" Mr. Kristol, an assistant editor of *COMMENTARY*, was born in New York in 1920. His article, "How Basic is 'Basic Judaism'?" appeared in the January 1948 number.

program. Or rather, they had a program with only two points. The first was a private point in the mind of Hitler: military expansion eastward, to carve out of Russia a huge province and re-enact the drama of the Teutonic Knights with a revised, happy ending. By the wealth and opportunities thereby obtained, he hoped to settle once and for all the possibility of, or the need for, Germany's ever having an internal politics of its own. All Germans would be completely involved in rule and exploitation, with the Nazis as overseers over sub-overseers.

The other point, the public and by far the more important one, was racism, i.e., anti-Semitism. Only a few contemporaries—Jacques Maritain, Maurice Samuel, Vladimir Jabotinsky, and some others—understood the true significance of anti-Semitism for the Nazis. The civilized world as a whole saw it simply as a nasty appeal to prejudice, a bit of dirty fighting on the part of unscrupulous politicians. They did not see that without anti-Semitism the Nazis could never have captured and maintained power. It was the one point in their entire system of double-talk that they really believed in (though it too was compounded of double-talk); it was the source of their special emotional dynamism and distinguished them from the other nationalist parties of Weimar Germany. Indeed, there was no Nazi ideology aside from anti-Jewish ideology: all the scientific, historical, and sociological tomes of the Nazi academies had no other point of reference. Nazism existed to exclude the Jew, to hurt him, and even, if necessary, to be hurt by him, for that too set the seal on exclusion. Up until the very end, Hitler, Himmler, Goebbels, and Company maintained that the Third

Reich was, quite literally, fighting a war to the death with international Jewry.

Nazi "theory" otherwise was a grab-bag of everything that sounded useful: Rosenberg's "Aryanism," Sombart's Prussian imperialism, Othmar Spann's "pure" fascism, Stefan George's aristocratism; it celebrated the purely subjective, the purely utilitarian, the "estrangement from the absolute" (Rosenberg). Nazi politics was the politics of the freebooter: its aim was absolute power in a period of social disintegration when established centers of authority had dissolved, and the masses of people lay passively awaiting violation. The essence of this attitude was best expressed by Ernst Juenger: "We find ourselves in the last phase of nihilism, characterized by the fact that while the creation of new systems and rules has already been carried far, the corresponding values have not become visible. . . . In such a situation, pain is the only standard that yields secure orientation."

THE word "totalitarian" has obscured the nihilistic character of Nazi politics, since it seems to imply some sort of program for a drastic re-making of the social order.* We are still imbued with the rationalist political theory of the 18th century which ascribed to each government its "reason" and "purpose," and this has been strongly reinforced by Marxism with its theory of the state as an instrument to further the ends of the ruling class. Our concept of government, even "totalitarian" government, is still a positive one: the suggestion that a certain group rules because it has, by dint of violence and intrigue, successfully exercised an unbridled lust for power is regarded with suspicion, and searching parties continue to set

*The application of the term "totalitarian" to both Stalin's Russia and Hitler's Germany seems to me a source of confusion. True, the effects of both systems on the free individual are similar. But in its ideology, motives, and mainsprings of power, there is an essential difference between Communism and Nazism. Communism can claim a certain continuity with significant aspects of Western civilization—which may possibly make it a more profound and enduring menace to freedom and liberty. It has an elaborate ideology (Marxism) that claims absolute truth, and whose historical origin is linked to the flowering of "scientific" and "humanitarian" sentiments; thus, it has an initial appeal to "good" people. Furthermore, it receives constant encouragement from the present industrial society, with its twin drives toward a centralized "welfare state" and a "democratic" mass culture.

out energetically to find out who is "really" pulling the strings and for what purpose.

The Nazis, it is now clear, neither defended capitalism on principle nor destroyed it on principle. They were not interested in economic principles but in economic facts. Up to 1939 they wanted an economy that would keep the German people reasonably content and give them a chance to consolidate their position vis à vis the military, the civil administration, and the remnants of the democratic opposition. The bankers were able to give them this, so the bankers ran the economic system. When the needs of a two-front war became imperative, the bankers went out and the technocrats, led by Albert Speer, came in to mobilize for total war. When it was clear that the war was lost, the Nazis tried desperately to pull the entire German economy, including its very physical plant, down to ruin with them; that was the meaning, and the only meaning, of their "scorched earth" policy.

Burton Klein, in an article, "Germany's Preparation for War," in the March 1948 *American Economic Review*, demonstrates that, until 1939, Germany's "war economy" was a myth constructed mainly for foreign consumption. German aircraft production at the beginning of the war was about the same as Britain's while its rate of tank output was actually lower. When Hitler told the Reichstag and the world that he had spent ninety billion Reichsmarks for rearmament, it was a blatant lie—but the lie worked. When German troops were sent into the Rhineland (we learned at the Nuremberg trials), they had instructions to retire at the first sign of a French soldier; but the French were paralyzed by their "unpreparedness." Similarly, before Munich, the German generals, terrified at the prospect of war with England, drew up plans to assassinate Hitler and Himmler; when Chamberlain capitulated, Hitler's "infallibility" seemed more than enough to compensate for any military weakness.

The Germans did not have a war economy, partly because Hitler thought in terms of a blitzkrieg and partly because Schacht, that "financial wizard," was a conservative economist who trembled at the thought of deficit financing and the specter of inflation. His recovery program consisted of public expenditures (covered mainly by taxation) coupled with strict wage and price controls to ensure greater employment and production rather than

higher wages and prices. The program worked and the recovery was a real one for the German civilian: production of such civilian goods as autos, furniture, radios, etc., all rose considerably above the 1929 peak, while the share of national output directed toward rearming was not much higher than among the Western powers.

There was no mystery about German economics (though there was considerable mysterious talk about German economics). Economic recovery under the Nazis was the result of operations that any sensible and alert democratic government could have taken. That fact is, perhaps, the most poignant comment on the entire subject.

IF "totalitarian economics" was a fabricated myth, then "totalitarian politics" was only slightly less so, on the evidence marshalled in *The Last Days of Hitler* (Macmillan, 1947), by the Oxford historian and British Army Intelligence Officer, H. R. Trevor-Roper.

Nazi politics were not organized on any principle other than power. The questions of delegating authority and administering the functions of government were settled by a dog-fight among those who shared in the power. Writes Trevor-Roper: "Only policy, not administration, was effectively controlled from the center. . . . The structure of German politics and administration, instead of being, as the Nazis claimed, 'pyramidal' and 'monolithic' was, in fact, a confusion of private empires, private armies, and private intelligence services." (Of these latter, there were thirty competing organizations supplying the Foreign Ministry with information, almost all of it erroneous.) In turn, the leaders determining policy were themselves under a whole set of hidden and irresponsible influences. Who will ever be able to estimate the influence on world history of one Dr. Theodor Morrell, Hitler's personal physician, who made a fortune on quack patent medicines with which he systematically poisoned the *Fuehrer*? Or of Himmler's astrologer, Wulf, or his masseur, Kersten—on whom he became more and more dependent?

The Nazi regime as described by Trevor-Roper, was—especially after 1941—a royal court rather than a government, with power concentrated in the hands of Hitler, and all the courtiers (Goering, Goebbels, Himmler, Bormann) intriguing for the succession. There is probably no more fantastic spectacle in all history than

the one painted in brilliant detail in *The Last Days of Hitler*: the court in "session" in Hitler's bunker, Berlin burning and crumbling before their eyes, communications with the outside world practically shut off, the Russian armies in the suburbs, defeat a matter of days or hours, Hitler moving imaginary divisions on his military map—and all the Nazi leaders plotting furiously to be the heir to the power that they were sure Hitler would leave behind him! Each had his cabinet picked, posts allotted, and the terms of his "deal" with the Western powers worked out in detail.

With "statesmen" of this order at the top, it is no wonder that Nazi "totalitarianism" was not a very efficient affair. Samuel A. Goudsmit, an atomic scientist, tells in his book *Alsos* (Henry Schuman, 1947) of the incredible disorganization of Nazi scientific research. ("Alsos" was the code name of the War Department mission that followed the army into Europe in search of evidence of Nazi preparations for atomic warfare.) There was no coordination between the different branches of the armed forces or between the armed forces and the universities. Party hacks who "did not believe in modern physics" because of its "Jewish-intellectual bias" were given posts of authority. German scientists were indiscriminately drafted while Hitler's favorite dancers and astrologers received exemptions. One discovery excited and frightened the Alsos mission: they found that the Auer chemical company was frantically acquiring thorium in occupied France and the Low Countries. But it turned out that all that Auer had in mind was to incorporate thorium in a new toothpaste with which it hoped to dazzle the market.

Yet, Nazi "totalitarianism" made one claim that was only too well founded: Hitler was Germany's *Fuehrer* and his word was law. The longer we stare at Nazism the more our eyes focus on Hitler. He was its creator, his authority was supreme and unquestionable for every moment of its history; his notions and his whims dictated Nazi policy in every sphere; and there can be little doubt that his death would have been a death-blow to the regime itself. Hitler was Nazism. The war was *his* war—the generals and bankers were fearful and helpless. The extermination of the Jews was *his* project—as late as 1942, Goebbels was thinking of expelling them to Madagascar. The decision to fight to the bitter end, to see Germany forever destroyed rather than yield, was

his decision. To the last second of his life, completely isolated in his Berlin bunker, every Nazi leader followed his wishes, or what they thought were his wishes.

Trevor-Roper sums this up: "Liberal refugees, theoretical Marxists, despairing reactionaries have pretended, or persuaded themselves, that Hitler was himself only a pawn in a game which not he but some other politicians, or some more cosmic forces, were playing. It is a fundamental delusion. Whatever independent forces he may have used, whatever incidental support he may have borrowed, Hitler remained to the end the sole master of the movement which he had himself inspired and founded and which he was himself, by his personal leadership, to ruin. Neither Roehm nor Himmler, neither the army nor the Junkers, neither high finance nor heavy industry, ever controlled that demonic and disastrous genius, whatever assistance they may at times have given or received, with whatever hopes or credulities they may have solaced their misgivings, their frequent disappointments."

How and why this fussy, brutal, sentimental, hysterical, petty bourgeois could hypnotize his close associates, his followers, his party, and his nation is something a future biographer will have to work hard at to make clear to us. (Our contemporary biographers, like Konrad Heiden, have not, for all their good works, been successful in this respect.) The slow disappearance of the "great men" theory of history, ever since Carlyle, has not prepared us to cope with a phenomenon like Hitler. And it is more than likely that Carlyle himself would be at a loss—if not for words, then for an acceptable explanation. For the Nazis were in no sense "great men"; they were neither 20th-century Attilas nor Torquemadas nor Genghis Khans, and the more we ponder them the more incredible does the very fact of their leadership appear.

WHEN one studies the case of The Nazi there comes a sickening emptiness of the stomach and a sense of bafflement. Can this be all? The disparity between the crime and the criminal is too monstrous.

We expect to find evil men, paragons of wickedness, slobbering, maniacal brutes; we are prepared to trace the lineaments of *The Nazi* on the face of every individual Nazi in order to define triumphantly the essential features of his character. But the Nazi leaders were not diabolists, they did not worship evil. For—

greatest of ironies—the Nazis, like Adam and Eve before the fall, knew not of good and evil, and it is this cast of moral indifference that makes them appear so petty and colorless and superficial. The image of *The Nazi* is great and grotesque in our minds, but the Nazis in person turn out to be quite small and often ludicrous. That is what made the Nuremberg trials such a dismal affair. In the newsreel coverage of the trial we saw a harassed, uncomprehending crew of unshaven individuals—without dignity, fanaticism, obsessive hate, or the stature that large-scale wickedness often bestows. In comparison with John Dillinger, Hermann Goering looked like an indignant pickpocket. And to read through the proceedings of the trials, and to study the memoirs and diaries of the Nazi leaders that have recently been made available, only sharpens this impression of disproportion, and encourages the disorder of our sentiment.

For instance, in the light of his deeds it is hardly possible to think of the Nazi as pathetic; yet pathetic is the word that comes first to mind in reading the clumsy, coarsely written memoirs of Alfred Rosenberg, composed while awaiting trial in Nuremberg. (An English translation will soon be published in this country by Ziff-Davis.) The supreme ideologue of Nazism portrays himself for us as a superficial and simple-minded man, sincere in all his hypocrisies, a failure in Nazi politics, tearfully sentimental on his own account, an earnest philosophical quack. He had neither sufficient straightforward brutality nor sufficient political sense to secure a lasting position of authority in the Nazi movement. He was officially honored and respected as the author of the "Aryan bible," the bulky and unreadable *Myth of the Twentieth Century*, which sold over a million copies in Germany but which no one (including Hitler) read, and which was translated into only one foreign language—Japanese! Unofficially, he was despised by everyone (except Hitler—who thought him a loyal friend) and he had to sit fretfully and watch all the prerogatives of power snatched from his hands by Himmler, Bormann, and Goebbels.

Like Hitler, Rosenberg started out as a painter. But the artistic temperaments of the two men were of a different order. Hitler was a failure, a frustrated neurotic with a grudge against society. Rosenberg was, on his own level, quite successful; in a different era he would have been one of those banal painters of

landscapes, member of a community art club, instructor in a small mediocre school, idolized by the mayor's wife, a cultural lion at civic tea parties. But the Russian and German revolutions cut off the roots that promised such a flowering; and his "philosophical ideas" (really puffed-up versions of his own rather primitive esthetic doctrines) found a response in the hot-bed of intellectual charlatanism that was post-war Munich; instead of the crank notions of the village esthete (privately printed and distributed) they became the official "ideology" of a powerful nation.

IN 1934, when Rosenberg was the Nazi spokesman in the Reichstag and elsewhere for "the suffering Germans in all foreign lands," his first collection of speeches and essays was published under the title of *Blood and Honor*. His publisher noted in a preface: "Born on January 12, 1893 in Reval (Esthonia), Alfred Rosenberg, as a Baltic German, lived through the sorrow and suffering of the *Auslanddeutsche*, and then the Russian Revolution. In order to bring this suffering to the attention of all Germans, and in order to help guard against the Communist menace, he came to Germany at the end of 1917. . . ."

In his memoirs, Rosenberg gives a quite contrary picture. In the saccharine vocabulary of a slick-magazine, he recollects his "golden youth" when, as a "superior" German-speaking Balt he was able to combine day-dreams of the Teutonic Knights with all the practical ease and advantages of a middle-class household in a Russia where pan-Slavism was only beginning to gnaw at a long tradition of tolerance for the Baltic Germans. He attended the Reval *gymnasium* where he was a model student, and where he was chosen *Klassenprimus* not for his scholarly record but for the good effect it might have on some of the more wayward students. Of his attitude toward his teachers Rosenberg writes: "When I was later active in Germany, I was astonished at the always erupting hostility toward teachers. This was freely and crassly expressed by many of my [party] comrades. . . . Of my teachers in Reval, I can speak only with the greatest respect." He also makes a point of the fact that there were Russian and Esthonian students among the Germanic majority, without the slightest hint of hostility or conflict.

It was Rosenberg's first wife, Hilda, who opened the door of European culture to him. Interested in Russian art, music, and ballet,

she was the antithesis of the young, provincial *Baltdeutsch*. Under her influence he read Nietzsche (whose theatrical pathos disgusted him) and Tolstoy's *War and Peace* ("It made a very deep impression on me, and remains for me the great novel of European literature"). He continued his studies—architecture at the technical *Hochschule* in Riga—and his painting. When he was able to see a display of early canvases by Picasso and Matisse, his reaction was: "Very bright: white, blue, rose, with many interesting shades, smoothly and ably painted; on the whole, however, superficial and sensational. This path does not lead to great art."

The years of war and revolution were comparatively placid for Rosenberg. He went to Moscow, boarded with a Russian family, studied, went to hear music at the Savoy, and passed his evenings in the coffee-houses on the Tverskaya. He read Houston Stewart Chamberlain with gusto, but the Russian revolution on which he became Germany's expert, passed him by at the time. Returning to Reval, he volunteered for the German army but was turned down because Esthonia was occupied territory; nor could he get permission to go to Germany. With time on his hands, he entered a competition sponsored by a furniture company to design the interior decoration of a living room. His two sketches won two second prizes.

Finally, in November 1918, Rosenberg was permitted to enter Germany. On this event he pontificates in his memoirs: "So I came to the Reich, originally a man given to art, philosophy, and history, who had never thought of mixing in politics. But I had observed the present, which was to become history."

ROSENBERG'S development as a successful Nazi followed the familiar pattern. Foot-loose and penniless in turbulent Munich, he gravitated toward the kindred souls who populated the Munich beerhall cellars: the White Russians, ex-officers, crackpot economic theorists—all those who ultimately coagulated into the NSDAP. His high-flown theories, especially his anti-Semitic ones, met with approval, and he turned out to be an industrious and prolific publicist.

But the high rank that Rosenberg attained in the Nazi hierarchy turned out to be a hollow success. The real politicians among the Nazis considered him a useful adjunct, but by no means indispensable and often very much of a

nuisance. As early as 1925, Rosenberg whines, he could not get Hitler to take him along on his political tours. The founder and most renowned expositor of the theory of the master race was rudely shoved aside by political bosses who were ignorant of the essential polarity of Germanic and Greek art, and whose personal lives and financial dealings were not as impeccable as his, but who knew the business of party intrigue. As a result, Rosenberg adopted a protective ignorance, a careful "non-political" reaction to internal party happenings. (The fact that he was physically a coward was another motive.) Even while waiting for his trial at Nuremberg, he confessed ignorance as to what had really happened on the night of June 30, 1934 when Roehm and his cohorts were assassinated. His self-assumed ignorance was carried over to his job as Commissioner of Eastern Territories during the war: he left the liquidation of hundreds of thousands of Jews and Russians to his subordinates (appointed by the SS) who played the game of keeping him uninformed with a straight face. When conditions reached the point where it was impossible for him any longer to pretend, he protested to Hitler that the SS was overstepping its authority. Hitler soothed him, and the SS kept right on.

Rosenberg was no more swayed by humanitarian sympathies than the rest of his colleagues, and his criticism of the mass exterminations in the East was based partly on the grounds of political expediency (Goebbels shared his viewpoint on this matter), and partly on sheer exasperation at seeing all his powers successively appropriated; a bungler in every position that Hitler gave him, he was nonetheless anxious for political power. Brooding over his dispossession, he saw in it the corruption of Nazism from a high ideal to a coarse political dictatorship, in his own words, "the victory of sectarianism over the idea."

To Rosenberg, Goebbels was "a Mephistopheles." When Baldur von Schirach remarked that after all Goebbels was an artist too, Rosenberg retorted: "No, a *schmierant*." And in his memoirs, his vanity claimed its revenge on the brilliant and warped fanatic who usurped control of Nazi propaganda: "Hitler, of course, knew that I had a deeper understanding of art and culture than Goebbels, who was scarcely able to see beneath the surface." It is Goebbels whom Rosenberg blames for the anti-Jewish "excesses" and for having "linked art with propaganda." (!)

SIMILARLY, Heinrich Himmler was for Rosenberg the "Gray Eminence" of the Third Reich. (Himmler had been born into a clerically-minded family and had revolted against political Catholicism; this only caused Rosenberg to remark bitterly: "A man can leave the Roman church ten times and still remain a Jesuit.") At length Rosenberg castigates Himmler for having absorbed all cultural institutions into the SS, for having brought the SS troops, in their brave obedience, into un-Germanic and horrible ways, and for having surrounded Hitler with satellites who fed him distorted versions of the true picture. In this, Rosenberg writes, he was ably abetted by Martin Bormann, the "mystery man" of the Third Reich. After 1941, Bormann, as Hitler's secretary, was the second most powerful man in Germany, the leader, in Rosenberg's words, of "the antechamber dictatorship"; yet he received very little publicity, his photo hardly ever appeared, his activities were barely mentioned in the press. "Bormann never uttered or defended a single idea. He led no men. He was the pure bureaucrat."

Those who are familiar with the history of revolutions will already have drawn the parallels. Trotsky on Stalin, Danton on Robespierre—always the same plaint of a revolution betrayed by willfull and vicious men. But the French and Russian revolutions *were* predicated on an ideal, which was as genuine and widely felt as the degeneration that followed. Nazism had no ideal, only Rosenberg possessed one, the dupe of his own propaganda. And perhaps he didn't have one either; his revulsion can as well be interpreted as that of a cowardly man, rationalizing his resentment against those better fitted to rule in the Nazi machine. In any case, he has left us his word: "A great idea was misused by small men. . . . National Socialism was a European answer to a century's question. . . . National Socialism was finally misused and corrupted by men on whom its creator fatefully placed reliance."

But Rosenberg was too facile a philosopher to stop at mere disillusionment. The trouble with National Socialism, he came to realize in the last months of the war, was that it had "ideal" and "organization" but no "form." It is "form" that ensures the purity of "ideal" and "organization." He began to devise a scheme for a conservative republic that would prevent the emergence of a one-party dictatorship, and soon had turned out a volume on political theory, entitled *The Power of Form*.

The work was destroyed in manuscript—and those who have looked into the *Myth of the Twentieth Century* will have few regrets.

It was inevitable that one of the Nazi leaders would reduce the inflated doctrine of "Aryanism" to its intellectual absurdity and prosaic brutality. This was Heinrich Himmler's task. Indeed, he took it so seriously and with such bloody consequences that Trevor-Roper refers to him as "the Great Inquisitor" of Nazism. However, Nazism was the kind of movement, and Himmler the kind of man, that could produce only a parody of a "Great Inquisitor." Hitler himself ridiculed Himmler's extravagant ideological pretensions,* while Speer regarded him as "half schoolmaster, half crank," and Rosenberg was appalled by his rigid application of Nazi dogma.

In his book *European Witness* (Reynal and Hitchcock, 1946), Stephen Spender remarks of the German that he "could not relate his own personality with his actions done in the name of duty." It is this gap between personality and duty which may help explain the picked *Einsatzgruppen*—for the most part educated men: doctors, lawyers, civil servants—who in cold blood exterminated several million people in Eastern Europe. And it helps us explain Himmler, a small, bespectacled, and mild bureaucrat whom his subordinates called, without irony, "gentle Heinrich," and who was a conscienceless murderer.

During the war, Himmler gave a speech to SS generals and police officials on the subject of concentration camps which reveals the mentality of the man:

"It would be extremely instructive for everyone . . . to inspect such a concentration camp. Once they have seen it, they are convinced that no one has been sent there unjustly; that it is the offal of criminals and freaks. . . . On the whole, education consists of discipline, never of any kind of instruction on an ideological basis, for the prisoners have for the most part slave-like souls. . . . Discipline means order. The order begins with these people living in clean barracks. Such a thing can really only be accomplished by us Germans, hardly another nation would be as human as

we are. The laundry is frequently changed. The people are taught to wash themselves twice daily, and to use a toothbrush, a thing with which most of them have been unfamiliar."

It is almost incredible that Himmler actually believed all this. But he did believe it—and more. Himmler set the SS foreign intelligence section to studying Freemasonry and Rosicrucianism, the significance of the suppression of the harp in Ulster, and the inner meaning of Gothic spires and Eton top-hats. He was especially interested in runes (the still undeciphered script of the Norsemen), hoping to prove a link between the "Aryans" and the Japanese. On April 1, 1946—five weeks before the end of the war—he conceived of colonizing the Ukraine with a new religious sect thought up by his masseur.

In 1935, Himmler created the *Ahnenerbe*—the Academy of Ancestral Heritage—to propagate the truths of *SS Wissenschaft*. On one occasion during the war, when he was away at the front, he wrote the following letter (quoted by Goudsmit) to SS Colonel Sievers, head of the *Ahnenerbe*:

"In future weather researches, which we expect to carry out after the war by systematic organization of an immense number of single facts, I request you to take note of the following:

"The roots, or onions, of the meadow saffron are located at depths that vary from year to year. The deeper they are, the more severe the winter will be; the nearer they are to the surface, the milder the winter.

"This fact was called to my attention by the *Fuehrer*.

Heil Hitler!
Himmler"

It seems appropriate to point out here that Himmler was graduated from an agricultural academy.

Unfortunately, this buffoonery was not always so funny. Its logic led to the setting up of the "Applied War Research" department in the *Ahnenerbe* which was responsible for the grotesque and idiotic experiments on selected concentration camp inmates.

In the last months of the war, Himmler became concerned with his reputation as a butcher. He appointed a new Reich Commissioner for concentration camps, to reorganize them in a "humanistic spirit." He ordered an end to forced evacuation of the camps in the face of advancing Allied armies. Lest these acts

* Hitler's attitude to "Aryanism" was a practical one: "Were it even proven that in the past there had been no Aryan race, it is for us to insist that such should exist in the future! For men of action that is the deciding standpoint." (*Mein Kampf*)

be misunderstood, he spoke his mind to a Jewish Swedish representative on April 19, 1945: "They say that I am trying to forge an alibi. I need no alibi; I always did what seemed right for my people. It did not make me a rich man."

When Himmler heard that Hitler was doomed in Berlin, he decided that history had called him. In an interview with the Swedish Red Cross representative, Count Folke Bernadotte, he offered to surrender on the Western front and keep up the fight in the East until the Allies came to his assistance. As Bernadotte left, carrying these terms with him, Himmler began to worry whether he should shake hands or bow when he met Eisenhower. He drew up a new cabinet and chose a new name for his party. On May 5th, Himmler held his last staff conference in Flensburg; he had plans to set up a provisional government in Schleswig-Holstein. His one remaining problem, he said, was that he needed an interview with General Montgomery. When he was finally captured by the British, the shock of being treated like a criminal was too great, and he took poison.

UNLIKE Rosenberg and Himmler, Joseph Goebbels was not interested in any version of the Aryan myth. He was, on the other hand, very much interested in political myths as elaborated by Georges Sorel and Vilfred Pareto. The political myth was the form by which he molded the body politic to suit his "creative vision." Goebbels is on record as having said of Dostoevsky: "He writes because writing is still in the 19th century one of the possible modes of existence. The political solution was as yet unborn." Like so many Nazi leaders, Goebbels had tried to be an artist and (like them) had failed. He then set out to seek a "higher" artistry in politics.

In a suggestive chapter of his book, Stephen Spender discusses in detail Goebbels' novel *Michael*, published in 1929 when Goebbels was already on the road to his "political solution":

"Very little happens in *Michael*. The hero is a young student, his mind full of memories of 1918, who is supposed to be studying at Heidelberg . . . He has love affairs and friendships. His relationship with people on whom he fastens his attention has two aspects. One is that others should believe in his own 'demon,' his genius. The other is that they are

his opponents. These two passionate impulses, together with his passionate nationalism, and a perpetual restless desire to transcend the narrow boundaries of his existence in postwar Germany on the wave of some tremendous emotion, leave him no room to be interested in human beings as human beings, and no room for self-criticism. Yet he has a great faith in himself, and if one asks how such a person can have such a faith, the answer is that the experience of constant turmoil gives him a convincing sense of the reality of his own existence, and it is this which he above all demands from life: to suffer, to be mad, to experience a sense of ecstasy."

Goebbels as a rebel was an esthetic rebel, not against any specific iniquities of postwar Germany, but against life and society that conditions and limits the individual (especially the ugly, club-footed individual that was Goebbels); he was as pure an embodiment of Nietzscheanism as could be contrived. And just as Nietzscheanism had strong affinities with the *fin de siècle* esthetic revolt against bourgeois society, so Goebbels seems to be in some sort of relationship with contemporary artists who revolt in disgust against their epoch and the people who inhabit it. There is, however, a decisive difference between Goebbels and such artists. Goebbels took to a "political" solution (as Nietzsche did not); after all to call a century a pigsty is one thing, to make it into a pigsty is another.

When Goebbels has his hero say: "Today we are all expressionists—men who want to make the world outside themselves take the form of their life within themselves," he expresses both his verbal affinity with the artist and his actual distance from him. For by the "world outside," the artist means the world of accomplished imagination, of paper and ink, bounded by the covers of a book: in creating this world, no matter how ugly, the artist may extend our understanding of human nature and possibilities. Goebbels, however, had in mind the world that bleeds—and a drop of blood is incommensurate with a bucketful of imagination.

Michael is full of the kind of ecstatic visions one might expect:

"I tear my heart out. What does a heart matter? I throw it into the storm of fire.

"I am a hero, a God, a Savior.

"I myself bleed. My arms hang down powerless.

"I have been hit.

"I become tired. I sink down.

"I lose consciousness."

BY THE time we meet Goebbels in his diaries, he has had considerable success in his "creative politics." He had, in the course of years, transformed Nazism from the ideological effervescence of a beer-hall into a working-class, "socialistic," anti-plutocratic movement that had swept the industrial Rhineland; he had created the *Fuehrer* myth; he had organized Berlin into a Nazi stronghold; he had built the most effective propaganda machine the world had seen up to that time; he was one of the most powerful—and by far the most intelligent—of the rulers of Germany. The days of *Sturm und Drang* were a dim memory, replaced by factional scheming, managing a country at war, trying to produce a baby a year (his total was five, all given names beginning with H), and the innumerable other obligations of Nazi power.

Those who look into *The Goebbels Diaries* (Doubleday, 1948) should know that what they are reading, though certainly written by Goebbels, is not a diary in the sense of something written in complete confidence and intimacy. That Goebbels kept a diary we know from many sources, aside from the inherent improbability of such a supreme egoist not taking advantage of the position history had accorded him. One of his subordinates, Rudolf Semmler, noted in his private diary: "For twenty years Goebbels has regularly and painstakingly kept a diary. Every day he spends an hour on this task. So far he has written twenty-three thick volumes in minute handwriting. Goebbels believes that one day this diary, read with the official archives, will provide one of the richest sources for the history of the Nazi party and Hitler's years of power."

Should these diaries ever turn up, there is no doubt that Goebbels' opinion would be vindicated. But these are not the diaries that make up the volume recently published. *The Goebbels Diaries* are excerpted from a type-written manuscript of some seven hundred and fifty thousand words, covering nine and one-half months of the years 1942-43. They were obviously dictated to a professional typist—the lines were triple spaced and the margins wide—at a tremendous speed; one day's dictation went up to eighty-five typed pages! It is likely that they are a preliminary self-edited version

of Goebbels' record which he was preparing to serve Germany and the world after Nazism's triumph; the various "indiscretions" that can be found would have been eventually eliminated to make up a document in conformity with the Nazi ideal, in such matters, of unmitigated dullness.

This helps explain why the *Diaries* are so exasperating and amorphous. They are neither an "inside story" of the Nazi regime nor of the Nazi mind; they provide only a few additional footnotes on well-worn themes.

The *Diaries* pay their respects to those anti-Nazis abroad who urged (unsuccessfully) that Allied propaganda seek to distinguish between the Nazis and the German people. For Lord Vansittart, Goebbels' discussion of the "anti-Hun" enthusiasm that he made fashionable among otherwise civilized intellectuals is sure to be unpleasant reading. At one point, Goebbels suggests the erection of a monument in Vansittart's honor, inscribed: "To the Englishman who rendered the greatest service to the German cause during the war." In another entry, he writes: "A much more clever form of propaganda against the Reich has been proposed in the United States. The idea is not to go against the German people but against Nazism. I sense a certain danger. . . . I gave orders that the German press is not to publish or discuss turns of speech such as are being used increasingly in the American press."

That Goebbels was a pathological anti-Semite of the kind visible on the "lunatic fringe" of American politics is common knowledge, and the *Diaries* offer nothing to modify this notion. Nothing, that is, except a flashing, occasional—but groundless—doubt as to the ingenuousness of his opinions. When he writes indignantly: "They [the Jews] are now trying to stir up the entire world merely to incite public opinion against the National Socialist Reich and its anti-Semitic convictions," it would seem to have more the ring of hypocrisy than of pathology. Similarly, on May 11, 1942 he was moved to the following complaint: "There are still 40,000 Jews in Berlin and despite the heavy blows dealt them they are still insolent and aggressive"; the Jews referred to were half-Jews or Jewish women married to Christians, and they were all, with justification, in a state of near-death from fright. But there was no propagandistic point to be made by these fantastic statements. There is no explanation for them at all, except that Goebbels believed them; and the fact that he

did believe them sets the stamp of authenticity upon his Nazism.

Goebbels is generally accounted as a "left-wing" Nazi, and if we keep in mind one qualification—that Goebbels would never allow a mere idea to stand between himself and an accretion of power—the label is correct. Goebbels' great contribution to Nazism had been to make it understandable and appealing to the urban working-class, and he personally held the military caste and the bourgeoisie in great contempt. In his diary we read: "Our prognosis regarding this war is surely right. It is being conducted by the capitalists of all countries against the German social commonwealth."

From the beginning, Goebbels demanded a "total war" which would concentrate all powers in the hands of a few Nazi rulers (including himself), and which would provide the opportunity for the annihilation of remnants of the old regime. As the end of the war drew close, when what he said could not possibly matter and when Hitler was sulking in his dugout, Goebbels had his day. Taking charge of Radio Berlin, he gave free vent to his radicalism, which turned out to be a radical nihilism. He created the specter of the Werewolves who would continue the fight for all time and under all conditions—at a moment when the leader of the Werewolves was negotiating a surrender to the British through the Danish underground movement.

He exulted at what Nazism had wrought: "Under the debris of our shattered cities, the last so-called achievements of the middle-class nineteenth century have been finally buried. . . . Together with the monuments of culture there crumble also the last obstacles to the fulfillment of our revolutionary task. Now that everything is in ruins we are forced to rebuild Europe. In the past, private possessions held us to bourgeois restraint. Now the bombs, instead of killing all Europeans, have only smashed the prison walls which held them captive."

No one paid any attention to these apocalyptic rantings, especially the Germans. But they inflated Goebbels' vanity and conscience (which, for him, were much the same thing) to a climax of dedication that saw him, alone among the top Nazis, remain loyal to his oath to die with Hitler, kill his wife and five children, and then commit suicide before he could be taken prisoner.

EVEN a casual glance over the members of the Nazi leadership corps will ascertain that it held no "well-balanced" individuals; in all of them there was an obvious psychic imbalance, an exaggeration of certain faculties and the atrophy of others, that was revealed in uncontrollable emotional drives, and a deteriorated sense of reality. It would seem from this that psychiatry is one discipline that might be appealed to in order to reach a true understanding of Nazism, and that the psychiatrist might be more helpful than the historian or the economist. But it does not turn out quite that way. Psychiatrists do find important things to say about the Nazi personality—but these point, not to the uniqueness of the Nazis, but to their psychological continuity with all of us who are not Nazis. We end up by knowing more about ourselves and about our potentialities for debasement, but little more about the Nazis.

This is the implicit point of *The Case of Rudolf Hess* (Norton, 1948), a report by the eight British and American psychiatrists who were in charge of Hess during his five-years imprisonment. It is a sober and unsensational work, in no way related to the wild incursions that psychiatrists so often make into politics and history. Dr. J. R. Rees, who edited the volume, does append a chapter in which he tries to probe into the specific German social background that produced Nazis; it is more scrupulous than the run of such attempts, though probably not less misleading.

Merely to look at the photograph of Hess on the dust cover gives rise to the belief that here at last we have the "real" Nazi; his heavy, beetled eyebrows, square jaw, and thin lips invoke images of cruelty and fanaticism. Just as Goebbels was the "public-relations" man and Goering the "military man," so Hess was the "party man" of Nazism. It is easy to imagine him as Professor Karl Haushofer's favorite student, studying geopolitics with passionate subjectivity; as leader of the SS, his every sinew taut with dogma; as Hitler's deputy, strutting across the platform at party ceremonies, his right arm forever stiffly upraised without apparent weariness.

Actually, however, by the time Hess flew to England, he had already lost his pre-eminent position in the Nazi movement. His colleagues regarded him as a "crackpot," and the SS came under the control of Himmler. It was only his past service and his loyalty to Hitler that kept

Hess among the leadership, if only in appearance. He was given hard-luck cases to "fix" and uplifting speeches to make to biologically fertile mothers.

Hess's sudden flight to England demonstrated that his fellow Nazis had not misjudged him. The purpose of this flight was exactly what Hess claimed it to be: he was shocked by the bombing of British women and children and was appalled by the prospect of a long and bloody war. His knowledge of British politics was a bundle of inaccurate clichés, and he was convinced that if he could pierce the curtain that Churchill had established around the King and his "court," he could persuade these latter to come to terms. That the third-ranking Nazi (on paper, anyway) should be so misinformed about the workings of the British government was in itself surprising. But a little probing by psychiatrists broke through the hard, stereotyped Nazi shell to the festering pulp beneath, and brought home to them the fact that they had a real "case" on their hands. Hess's pockets, when he parachuted into Scotland, bulged with homeopathic cures and quack medicines. He exhibited all the textbook neurotic symptoms: compulsive orderliness, tense secretiveness about his bowel movements, a fear of being passively conveyed in vehicles. He was an acute hypochondriac, a believer in "nature cures," and the victim of an immense persecution complex.

This persecution complex was at the basis of his anti-Semitism, which was really of classic dimensions. All during his imprisonment he complained of food poisoning, of being disturbed by strange noises at night, of torture at the hands of dentists and eye doctors. This he knew to be part of a world Jewish plot, whose power was due to the secret workings of "post-hypnotic suggestion" through which all the world's non-Jews were driven to self-destruction. When his attempted suicide (while in England) failed, he blamed the Jews for having incited him to the attempt because he had found out about their secret power of hypnosis. This Judaic post-hypnotic suggestion was produced by a secret chemical that was inserted into the world's food, and its consequences were manifold and subtle. Wrote Hess in his diary: "I could not foresee at this time that the Jews, in order to receive material for propaganda against Germany, would go so far as to bring the guards of German concentration camps, by use of the

secret chemical, to treat the inmates as the OGPU did." Nor was this the limit of Jewish subtlety; Hess found occasion to complain that the Jews went so far as to put a poison into his food that actually made him feel better.

Hess's notorious amnesia, which at Nuremberg he claimed to have faked, was beyond doubt genuine, at least for the major portion of his imprisonment. It is catalogued by the psychiatrists as "hysterical amnesia"—a self-protective device against the impingement of the unpleasantness of the real world. Here are two summaries of Hess's psychic state:

"The paranoid features of his personality were clearly seen in egocentricity, based on a deep feeling of insecurity, a fear of being injured and attacked. The psychological interpretation of such an attitude is that the patient has severe uncertainty and conflict about his own value and acceptance by society. He clearly has no great confidence in the goodness of other people, and while withdrawing in one sense into his 'self' he is always looking for an idealized person outside himself whom he might love and trust in order to assuage his loneliness." (Dr. Henry V. Dicks).

And: "The findings . . . indicate that Hess suffers from a true psycho-neurosis, primarily of the hysterical type which is grafted upon a basic paranoid personality. In other words, fundamentally Rudolf Hess is an introverted, shy, withdrawn, personality, who basically is suspicious of his environment and projects upon his surroundings concepts developing within himself" (Major Douglas Kelley).

It is something of a shock to a layman, after reading this case history, to find out that these psychiatrists did not at all consider Hess clinically insane or committable to an asylum. And it drives home the point that is suggested by the above two quotations: that Hess's psychic processes were not different in kind from those which might be discovered among French barbers, mid-Western university professors, or composers of letters-from-the-lovelorn in all lands. His unconscious faithfully adhered to the rules of the universal human unconscious, and we see that we are not entirely strangers to the twistings of his mind. If a list of his symptoms were clipped out and passed around as anonymous samples, they would arouse no special curiosity, so charac-

teristic are they of what we have come to expect psychiatrists to dig up.

But where then does the Nazi come from? Dr. Rees, in his concluding chapter, attempts an answer. In effect what he says is that just these trite psychological derangements, when present in large numbers of people and spurred on by social and political institutions, make up Nazism. He writes: "The Nazi movement would seem to have been but a late and, as it were, caricatured expression of modes of behavior and aspiration which had been noted about the attitudes of the German elite long before the war of 1914-18. The outstanding among these were tendencies to exert power and domination, to have status and 'honor' . . . and a tendency to glorify mass movement as an expression of unity in subordination to a great leader figure." The patriarchal structure of the German family encouraged the growth of authoritarianism, at the same time that it left a potent residue of inferiority and resentment that sought outlet in a "scapegoat" complex.

This type of analysis is not exactly new—nor does it improve with age. Of course, German social history is extremely pertinent to the present, as is all history. But it is the specifics of pertinence that have to be isolated and demonstrated. That the German family was patriarchal at all is a moot point (there are sharp differences between Catholic and Protestant families as well as regional differences). And there were many Germans who were very sensitive with regard to status and honor, who enjoyed speaking of "fatherland," "duty," and "hard work" who never became Nazis. Indeed most of the conspirators against

the Nazis were people of this kind (Goerdeler, Beck, Canaris, Gisevius, etc.), as are the members of the Social-Democratic, Communist, and Catholic center parties in that country today.

It is true that we cannot understand the present without understanding the past; but it does not follow that if we understand the past—or if we think we understand it—the present can be measured as a passive resultant. This sort of error—the "genetic fallacy"—is one that psychiatrists seem prone to commit by the very nature of their method, which works backwards. A complete and detailed case history of Rudolf Hess would tell us much about him—but it would not tell us the full meaning of his becoming a Nazi. For intervening in the working out of his complexes there would be the act of moral choice; it is this act that makes of Hess a Nazi rather than, say, a "shy, withdrawn" librarian suspiciously guarding the books of some provincial library. Or, instead of a moral choice, a moral convulsion of the personality that set the line upon which Rudolf Hess walked through life while that distressed subconscious of his worked away in its "shy, withdrawn" depths.

The Nazis are human: that is what the psychiatrists tell us. We always knew that, though it does no harm to have it confirmed.

But the Nazis are also non-human: that is what we, their wounded fellow-creatures, have to tell the psychiatrists and ourselves, as we point to the incredible horrors they so calmly worked on the body and soul of mankind. And it this very combination of the only-too-human and unimaginably-inhuman that makes the Nazis a persistent and nettling mystery for us.